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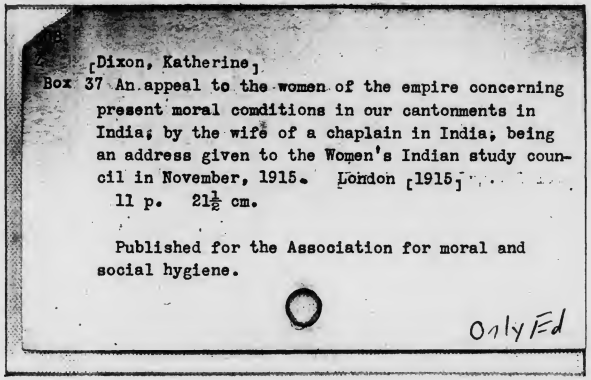
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AN APPEAL TO THE WOMEN OF THE EMPIRE

CONCERNING

PRESENT MORAL CONDITIONS IN OUR CANTONMENTS IN INDIA

BY

THE WIFE OF A CHAPLAIN
IN INDIA

Being an Address given to The Women's Indian Study Council in November, 1915

PUBLISHED BY THE ASSOCIATION FOR MORAL AND SOCIAL HYGIENE,
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PRICE 2D.

At the close of an address given to the Women's Indian Study Circle I was asked if I would issue it in the form of a pamphlet, in order to reach a larger circle of women in England. As I believe this to be a subject which concerns us all and not merely those of us whose lives are spent in India, I am glad to do so.

The Association for Moral and Social Hygiene has kindly undertaken to publish it, and I wish, herewith, to express my indebtedness to that Association, and especially to the Hon. Secretary, Dr. Helen Wilson, for much of the information regarding prostitution and "regulation" of which I have made use.

It has been truly said that "To 'cure' is the voice of the past; to 'prevent' the Divine whisper of to-day." It was with that hope that the following address was given.

KATHERINE DIXON

November, 1915

AN APPEAL TO THE WOMEN OF THE EMPIRE

CONCERNING

PRESENT MORAL CONDITIONS IN OUR CANTONMENTS IN INDIA

I am going to ask you to let me speak quite plainly on a very painful subject, namely, "The conditions of Prostitution in India with regard to our Soldiers." It is certain that we cannot help towards a better state of things in India unless we first understand the conditions that prevail there now, and I find that people in England—and frequently in India too—do not know what those conditions are. Some imagine that things are as bad as they were 30 years ago, which they are not; others believe that conditions in Indian stations are "much the same as they are in England." This is equally untrue. It has been very difficult to find out the real state of things, but I believe that the information I am going to give you to-day is accurate, and that I am in a position to speak with practical certainty.

In order to be quite clear, I have divided my address into four parts:

1. What a Cantonment is.
2. The conditions of prostitution in the cantonment and its environs.
3. The real thing to aim at.
4. An appeal for your help.

I. What a Cantonment is

A cantonment is that portion of an Indian Station which is set apart for the troops quartered in that place. In the cantonment, therefore, all buildings connected with the soldiers are to be found, i.e., the Garrison Church, barracks, canteens, schools for

soldiers' children, and hospitals for soldiers, their wives, and children.

Three hospitals are provided for the cantonment. They are—

1. The Station Hospital (for British soldiers).
2. The Family Hospital (for wives and children of British soldiers).
3. The Cantonment Hospital (for the servants and "followers," generally, of the troops, and for the inhabitants of the Native bazaars).

In every cantonment there is a regimental Indian bazaar, which supplies the various messes and contractors of the regiments, and the larger Military stations contain, within the cantonment limits, other bazaars " for the purposes of trade or residence of Indians." The demarcations of the cantonment are not at all clearly defined, and therefore part of a bazaar may be within and part outside its limits, and to the uninitiated it is difficult to tell where the cantonment ends and Civil Lines begin. The cantonment is under the jurisdiction of a cantonment Committee, the Secretary of which is the cantonment Magistrate, who is always a British officer. The other members of the cantonment Committee are as follows :—

The officer commanding the station (chairman).
The Principal Medical Officer.
Commanding Officers of other regiments in the station.
The District Superintendent of Police.
The Garrison Engineer.
Two or three Indian members.

II. The Conditions of Prostitution in the Cantonment and its Environs

In order that you may understand the conditions which prevail at present I will go back some years, if I may, and contrast the past conditions with those of to-day. In the early part of last century a great deal of venereal disease became prevalent amongst our troops in India, and the authorities, after the example of Napoleon on the continent, began to attempt to "regulate" prostitution. In 1868, shortly after the passing of the Contagious Diseases Acts in England, their efforts were supplemented by the passing of the Indian Contagious Acts. The effect of the C.D. Acts, both in England and India, was to enforce the medical examination of prostitutes, or of suspected prostitutes, and in order to do this it was necessary to have a Register of prostitutes and their addresses; the practical result being to put brothel-keepers under the protection of the law. In India the Military Authorities went further; they instituted brothels in cantonments and kept an official hand upon them; they were Government institutions. Yet in spite of these measures

disease went on increasing, and in 1886 an order was actually issued to the Quartermasters of the various regiments to keep these brothels supplied with young and attractive girls in order to induce the soldiers to frequent those houses and not the ones outside cantonments.

That system is universally condemned in India to-day, and it no longer exists. It was abolished in 1888 by orders from the Secretary of State for India, after a striking debate in the House of Commons. In 1889 the Cantonment Act was passed. This Act repealed the Indian C.D. Act and was intended to clear the whole situation, but unfortunately it left the door open, to a modified extent, to the old evils by giving the matter over largely to the discretion of the Commanding Officer in each station. The compulsory examination of prostitutes continued and the brothels remained under official toleration. In 1895 an Act was passed definitely prohibiting both, but this was repealed in 1897.

Now we come to the conditions of to-day. *There is no officially recognised system of regulation in India now.* Efforts are made to deal with prostitution and disease according to the practices (modified) of the C.D. Acts, but these efforts are to be attributed to individual Commanding Officers and not to the Government of India. Officially the Government knows nothing of these practices, though unofficially they must be aware of them. The matter is entirely under the control of the officer commanding each station, and therefore the conditions will be found to vary with the view that he takes of the question. He may refuse to concern himself in the matter altogether, or, after consultation with the Medical officer and the Police officer, he may "permit" a brothel, either within the cantonment limits or at a short distance from them. Such a brothel is under police supervision. The methods of dealing with disease also vary. In some places women still present themselves for medical examination; in most cantonments, however, there is no periodical medical examination, but when a soldier becomes infected he is required to point out the source of infection; the woman is then arrested by the police and—whether she is in one of the tolerated brothels or not—she is given her choice of going to the cantonment hospital for examination and treatment, or of leaving the station. This amounts to a kind of guarantee that the prostitutes who are allowed to remain in the tolerated houses are considered healthy, and it is so understood by the soldiers, who believe that they are thus protected by the authorities. You will see, therefore, that there is still a certain amount of official control over brothels in or near the cantonments.

(a) *The effect upon the soldier's mind.*

How can this fail to have a bad effect, morally, upon our soldiers in India? In England, as you know, brothels are illegal

and are liable to be raided by the police; the keeping of disorderly houses is expressly forbidden, and the owners, as well as the tenants, are liable to punishment. In one year (1911) in England and Wales, 1,051 persons were charged with brothel keeping, and 811 were convicted and either imprisoned or fined. In India the soldier finds that certain brothels are recognised officially, are under police supervision, and are legal, provided the women inmates are free from disease. On the arrival of drafts of recruits in India the men are lectured on the dangers of venereal diseases, and in some of these lectures they have been told that if they only frequent authorised brothels they will escape those dangers. The result is that a large number of men do frequent these brothels. They are distinctly taught that the thing to be feared and avoided is disease rather than vice. Can you wonder that the moral standard and sense of moral responsibility of our men is greatly lowered in consequence? Have you ever thought what effect frequenting a brothel would have upon a man's character? It stores up in his mind experiences of the lowest description, which he can never forget, and which make him —as R. L. Stevenson once said—unfit for the society of his future wife and children. Does the moral heritage of his children count for nothing? If only for the sake of the man, his wife, and his children, I protest against "tolerated" brothels.

(b) *The effect upon the women concerned and upon Indians generally.*

We cannot wonder if in some places it appears to the Indians that the British Military authorities require a certain number of healthy prostitutes for their troops. I need not enlarge on the obvious encouragement to prostitution when it appears to be legalised in this way; nor need I point out to you the equally obvious danger of "slave traffic" in India, where the women are particularly helpless and where native police are never above suspicion of bribery. Who concerns himself with the antecedents of the girls who fill the brothels? No one. Who concerns himself with the fate of the woman who is turned out of the station when she is no longer fit to be used by our soldiers? No one. We British are, in fact, a source of danger to the very girls we are bound to protect, and we are undoubtedly trying to save our soldiers from disease at the expense of these subject races.

I am told that Eastern ideas of morality are not those of the West; but have we not effected changes in age-long customs which we believe to be wrong? Have we not abolished suttee and infanticide? It is hypocritical to hide ourselves behind "custom" where prostitution is concerned. Is not prostitution, to those of us who realise its moral and physical degradation, as great an evil as infanticide? What mother would not rather see her daughter dead than given over to the hideous life of a brothel?

In some parts of India it is true that there are prostitutes, the so-called temple girls, whose life is connected with the religious

ceremonies, and they are stated to be a caste by themselves. Needless to say these women would refuse to have anything to do with any English soldier, and they are on quite a different footing from the ones of whom I am speaking. I do not believe that prostitution (with the possible exception of the temple girls) is considered an honourable profession by the Indians. Certainly in India, as in every country, it is the friendless girls who are in most danger of becoming prostitutes, and there the trade seems to be recruited also from amongst the little Hindoo widows who are always under a ban of disgrace.

I am glad to be the champion of these friendless and ignorant Indian girls and widows, as I hold that the uplift of Indian men and women is our only justification for being in their country at all. We have abolished suttee, but I do not hesitate to say that—officially—we are doing nothing to discourage the equally great evil of prostitution. We can at least do this by refusing to recognise or regulate brothels for the use of our soldiers, thereby making it apparent to the Indians that brothel-keeping, like suttee and infanticide, is contrary to our English code of morality.

I maintain that this method of attempting to control disease is an immoral one. It is wrong and unjust to our soldiers in India. It is still more wrong and unjust to the women of India. In England this has been thoroughly recognised since the C.D. Acts were repealed in 1886, so much so that when the Royal Commission was appointed in 1913 it was expressly forbidden to consider or recommend any return to the principles or practices of the Contagious Diseases Acts. The countries where regulation has been in force are abandoning it one by one. Norway, Denmark, Holland, and Italy have already followed England's example, and Government Commissions in France, Sweden, and Chicago have reported against it. At an International Medical Congress in London in 1913, where leading doctors attended from every civilised country, all the Specialists from France, Germany, Denmark, and the United States, united in the assertion that regulation of prostitution has failed to promote the public health.

The health of the Home Army has gone up steadily since the repeal in England of the C.D. Acts. The admissions to hospital for venereal diseases in 1886 were 267 per 1,000 men; in 1912 there were only 54.6 per 1,000. This has been attained without anything in the nature of regulation. During the same period there has been an equally remarkable diminution amongst British troops in India. In the official published report this is attributed to "a variety of causes, amongst which are the personal influence of the Commanding officers, the spread of Temperance, the variety of games and amusements which fill up spare time, the more thorough treatment of disease by which relapses are checked, and finally the

deterrent influence of the loss of 'service pay' which those who contract these complaints have to suffer."

These influences have been at work in England as well as in India, and it is to them that the diminution of disease is to be attributed. They will act the more powerfully when every semblance of official provision for vice shall have been abolished. We acknowledge that much has been done to improve the conditions of and to discourage immorality in the soldier in India, and we believe that the Government of India has those aims in view. But we know that the Government, the Military authorities, and the Chaplains, alike, are hampered in their efforts by the conditions that still exist in many places, and we wish to convince them that the time has come for an advance in India that will sweep away the remains of this discredited system with its degrading effect upon men and women.

III. The Real Thing to Aim at

Venereal diseases are due, as doctors tell us, to infection which is extremely common amongst prostitutes. The argument of those who uphold regulation is that, as disease is so prevalent and so terrible in its effects, it is the duty of doctors to set to work to control and cure it. Whilst on the face of it that appears to be a sound argument, it is really very poor science. It would obviously be bad science to tolerate the conditions which are the commonest cause of disease, and then set to work to cure the disease itself, whilst allowing the conditions to remain. What should we think, for instance, of doctors who, when faced with an outbreak of malaria, instead of draining the swamp which caused it, merely turned their attention to limiting the ravages of the disease and curing the infected patients? Scientifically the position would be absurd. Yet is not this precisely what regulation attempts to do? The obvious commonsense thing to do is to drain the swamp. If prostitution is a cause of disease, it is only by attacking prostitution itself that we can hope to cure it. The expedient of regulation is about as effective as putting cotton wool on cancer: it does not touch the root of the evil.

But is it not true that we are all beginning to realise that prostitution is a *moral* evil which can only be fought by moral means? *It is a vice to be conquered, not a disease to be legislated for.* The less sin there is, undoubtedly the less disease there will be, so we must attack the vice in India and try to make the commission of it by our soldiers harder rather than easier. There are a number of measures which might be adopted and would, we believe, benefit both soldiers and Indian women, if the Indian Government would consent to adopt them. A year ago I was discussing these proposals with an R.A.M.C. doctor who had come home, and he told me that he believed we should meet with very little, if any,

opposition from the doctors in India, as they dislike the present system and do not consider it successful medically. He added: "There is no reason why men should not keep straight in India, especially in these short service times (seven years, and many of them do."

Not long ago I was talking to a Bishop on leave from India, and he told me that an officer had once said to him that he considered that the average 100 soldiers might be divided, morally, in the following way:—20 per cent. would be immoral under practically any circumstances; 20 per cent. could be relied upon to keep straight; and the attitude of the remaining 60 per cent. was largely determined by the public opinion and customs of those amongst whom they live. Surely it is those 60 whom we have to help to keep straight in India, and this will not be done by allowing a tolerated brothel in their midst. Is it not sad to think that many soldiers come back to England having learnt to look upon vice as venial and necessary? A rescue worker once said to me, "Do the Military authorities in India know how much harder they make our work in England?"

May I mention what might be done to bring about a better state of things?

(1) Cantonments—or Civil Lines—should be cleared of tolerated brothels for the use of troops, and the law against solicitation should be enforced.

(2) There might be refuges and hospitals staffed by women, not under the control of the Military authorities, where women suffering from venereal or other diseases may be treated, and where prostitutes may be taught simple industries and induced, if possible, to give up the trade of prostitution.

(3) The co-operation of an intelligent Englishwoman would be of great assistance to the Cantonment Committee. In England the work of women as Town Councillors, Poor Law Guardians, etc., is increasingly appreciated, and in many places in India there must be women—doctors, missionaries, or wives of officials—who could and would render corresponding service. The appointment of women officials would probably be a later step; women health inspectors, relieving officers, and more recently women police are being employed in England: why not in India?

(4) The Military authorities should be urged to allow more soldiers to marry "on the strength."

Each of these reforms would be good by itself; if all could be combined they would practically solve the problem of the Indian cantonments. But before we can hope to get such a scheme accepted we must rouse interest in England in order to change public opinion in India.

IV. An Appeal for Your Help

Will you bring this subject to the light and make it known? Will you give us your help? We need it. It is not further legislation that we ask for, yet; without public opinion at the back of it legislation would be useless, we believe, in India. Laws can be evaded in the spirit even when they appear to be kept in the letter. We need a new public opinion—a new public conscience—which will make the present state of things in India impossible. Will you help to create it?

Surely what affects 75,000 of our sons and brothers in India concerns us; and can we stand aloof from the wrong which is being done to the women of India? I appeal especially to women because, though I realise thankfully that there is an ever increasing number of men who feel as we do to-day, I know that women have, on the whole, a more spiritual, and therefore a truer, outlook upon this subject, and we need to convince those men who still need convincing that our "ideal" standpoint is also the only practical one, the only commonsense one.

I have been speaking primarily on the condition of prostitution in India, but it is obviously only part of a vaster problem. Prostitution is the curse of practically every country. And what is the cause of it? It is that while the world has demanded chastity from one sex it has condoned and excused as natural the want of it in the other. That is the false doctrine we must attack, strongly and fearlessly, and in its place we must demand self-control for both men and women. May I beg you to speak out bravely? We have science on our side to-day; doctors no longer contend, as many of them did in the days of Josephine Butler's magnificent fight, that this is "a necessary evil." Prostitution is indeed a remedy worse than the disease! Which do you suppose is better in the long run for the individual and the community, self-restraint or self-indulgence? Can there be any doubt as we read the answer in the ruined lives of men, women and children? It has been truly said that if the best of mankind had not practised self-control over lower desires, civilisation and a higher human life would have been impossible.

Since I came to England I have studied the conditions of various kinds of Rescue work. Refuges and Homes, and sometimes one grows sick at heart. We women always deal with the *supply*, trying to stem it, trying to patch up the wrecks that reach us; but now I know it is hopeless unless, at the same time and with God's help, we also attack the *demand*. In order to do that I have lately addressed large numbers of soldiers upon this subject, and their response to a woman's point of view has been touching. To many of them I believe it was a completely new point of view. Sins of self-indulgence may be "human nature" but, thank God, human nature is

capable of heights of self-sacrifice also. Let men once realise that we call for self-control, for *self-sacrifice* from them so that the world may become what God means it to be and what, please God, it will be; so that these women, black, white, or brown, *our sisters*, may be saved from an appalling life; so that a new and healthy race of men and women may be born. They will respond I know. Surely at last, after all these centuries, our duty as women is plain? It is no longer to condone weakness but to brace to strength; to convince man what he is capable of; to help him towards the higher, truer, life which is coming to the world, the life in which man's body will be his slave and not his master, as it has been with so many in the past. We must tell men that we refuse to accept "regulation" or any other compromise with sin; we are fighting prostitution and we call on them to fight too; we cannot fight and compromise at the same time. Far too many men still look upon these sins in the light of a joke, or of a harmless personal weakness, and we must change all that, so that none of our men, our sons, or brothers, can ever sin lightly, knowing that it is our womanhood they sin against. Will you do all you can to form this new conscience? for it is the conscience that needs awakening. Will you take the ideal standpoint, the Christian standpoint, and convince others that it is the only practical solution of the problem?

Will you, by doing so, help to remove this injustice to the women of India which stains our country's name to-day?

If you will, no matter what are the difficulties, we in India will go forward, "looking beyond the shadows of the moment to catch the vision of the coming day."

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